Survey of and test pitting between the bell and disc barrows on Horsell Common Woking

Background

Woodham Common, a subsection of Horsell Common lies to the north-east of Woking in Surrey and forms a 'green finger' pointing in towards the centre of the town. The common is a typical Surrey heathland consisting of pine woodland with open areas of heather. The underlying geology is the sand of the Bagshot Beds with a 40cm-thick surface covering of windblown or water-deposited whitish sand containing scatters of water-worn pebbles. The ground is relatively level and, at at an approximate height of around 31m OD, does not obviously command extensive views in any particular direction.

Two barrows, one a bell (TQ 01413 59806) and the other, the only known disc barrow in Surrey (TQ 01472 59817), form a pair only about 15m apart (fig 1), while a second bell lies several hundred metres to the east. The bell and disc are Scheduled Monuments (National Monument Number 20148) and, in 2009, the managers of the common received consent to fell the pines growing on and around the the barrows and to construct a new path to run roughly north–south between the two. The aim was to encourage further public use of the common, while at the same time closing an existing east–west path that crossed both barrows and was damaging the monuments. A condition of the Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) was that the barrows should be subject to a topographic condition survey and the ground between them to a magnetometer survey and test pitting, to ensure that the proposed path would not disturb any archaeological remains. This work was carried out in November 2009 by the authors on behalf of Surrey Archaeological Society and at the request of the Horsell Common Preservation Society and the Surrey Wildlife Trust.

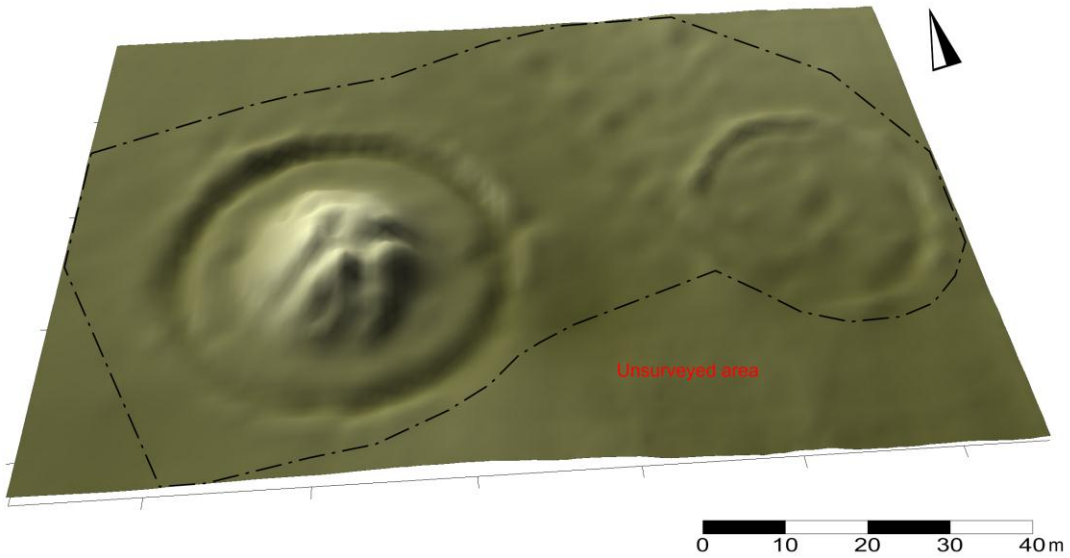

Fig 1 Horsell Common, Woking, Surrey Nat Mon no 20148
Digital terrain map of the bell and disc barrows

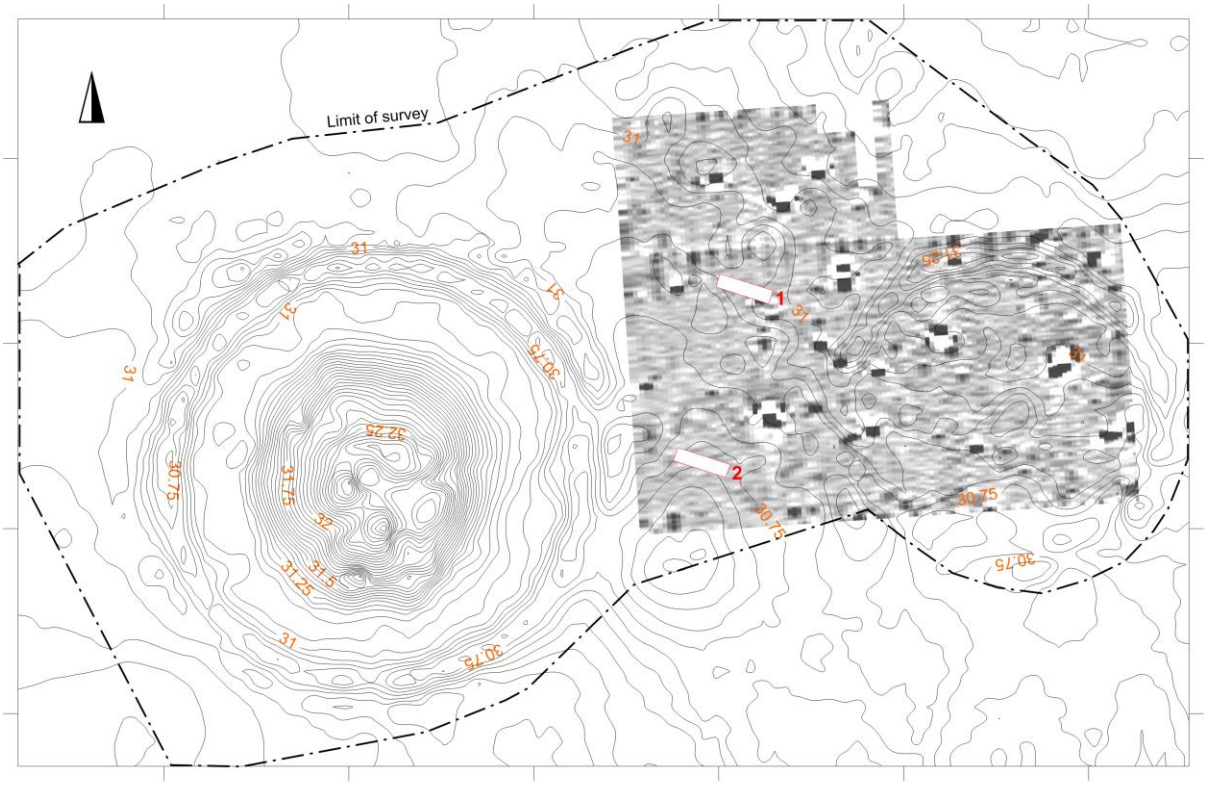

Fig 2 Horsell Common, Woking, Surrey Nat Mon no 20148
Contour survey of bell and disc barrows. Trenches in red. Magnetometer survey light grey. Contour heights in metres and facing uphill

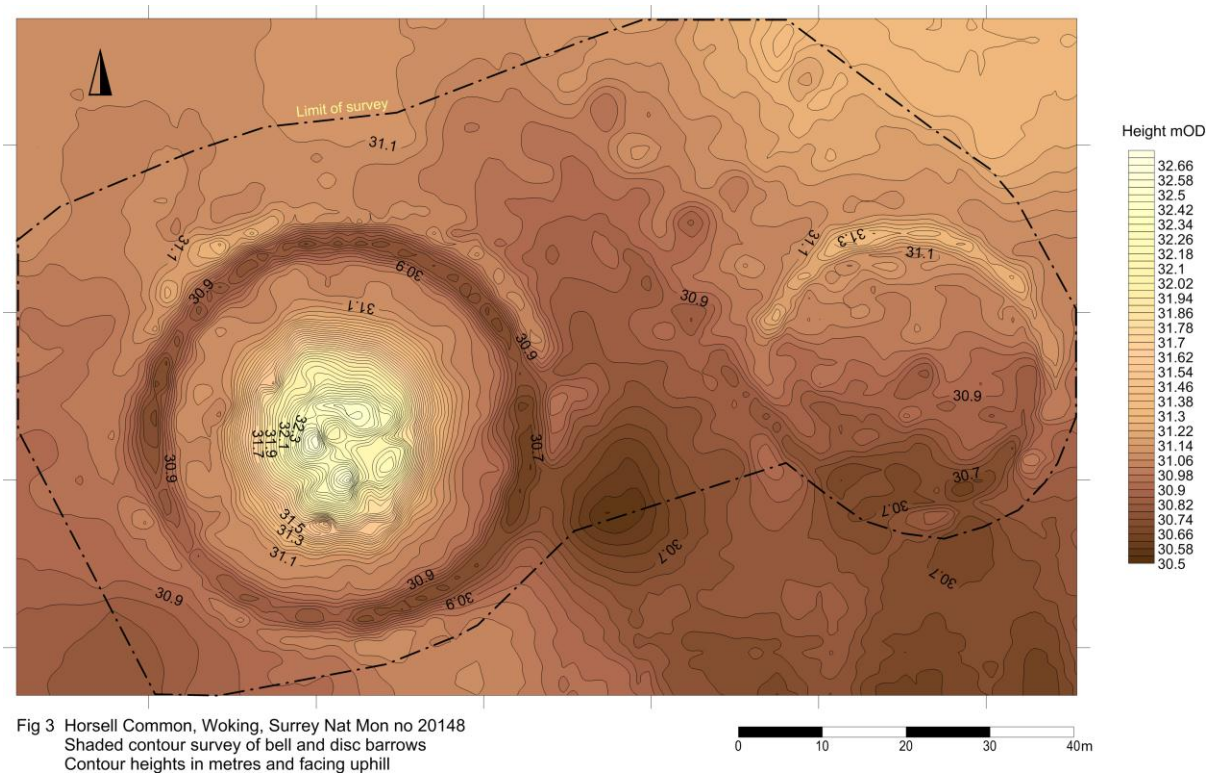

Fig 3 Horsell Common, Woking, Surrey Nat Mon no 20148
Shaded contour survey of bell and disc barrows
Contour heights in metres and facing uphill

Description of the barrows

The bell barrow, the westernmost of the pair, has a maximum diameter of 56m and the central mound survives to a height of 1.6m (figs 2–4). The barrow itself has faint traces of a shallow external ditch surviving to the north-east, a mostly complete circular bank and an internal ditch – all surrounding a berm on which stands the central mound. The mound has been badly damaged over the years and shows signs of two possible phases of antiquarian activity, having the typical dished summit and a wide slot-like depression up the southern flank. Grinsell reported (1987, 38) that there were 'several depressions on the mound before 1931; further damage recently (1931) by treasure seekers'. A second report (Bird *et al* 1985, 127) mentions that 'one of the bell barrows on Horsell Common illegally dug into, apparently to take core samples'. The reference is to this barrow. There is also what appears to be a military foxhole on the south-west flank and elsewhere a number of animal holes and scrapes. An east–west path has also cut a groove across the monument (fig 5).

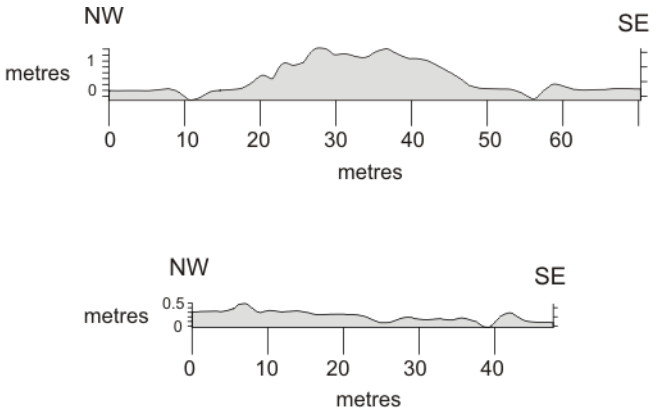

Fig 4 Horsell Common, Woking, Surrey Nat Mon no 20148
Profiles across bell barrow (top) and disc barrow (below). Vertical scales are greater than horizontal scales

The disc barrow(figs 2–4) is very slight, being around 38m in diameter with a maximum bank height of approximately 18cm and with a shallow10cm deep internal ditch. The south-western third of the of the circuit has virtually disappeared and has also been cut by a groove, possibly an old path or wheel rut, running at an angle of about 320 degrees across this section of the monument. This has, in the past, caused some confusion in interpreting the barrow and has led to the suggestion of the existence of an external ditch. There is now no sign of any central mound although there is a oval depression near the centre of the barrow, which may, again, be the result of treasure hunting. A continuation of the east–west path, mentioned above, also crosses the disc barrow and has flattened the bank and ditches where it passes over them (fig 5).

The surveys

The topographical survey was carried out over two days using a Topcon GTS 212 total station recording around 2400 readings and the various plans accompanying this report were produced with Surfer 9 software. The extent of the survey was limited by the surrounding tree cover. The magnetometer survey used a Geoscan FM 256 instrument and Geoplot 3 software, with zig-zag traverses at 1m intervals and four readings per metre. The survey covered the ground between the monuments and included the greater part of the

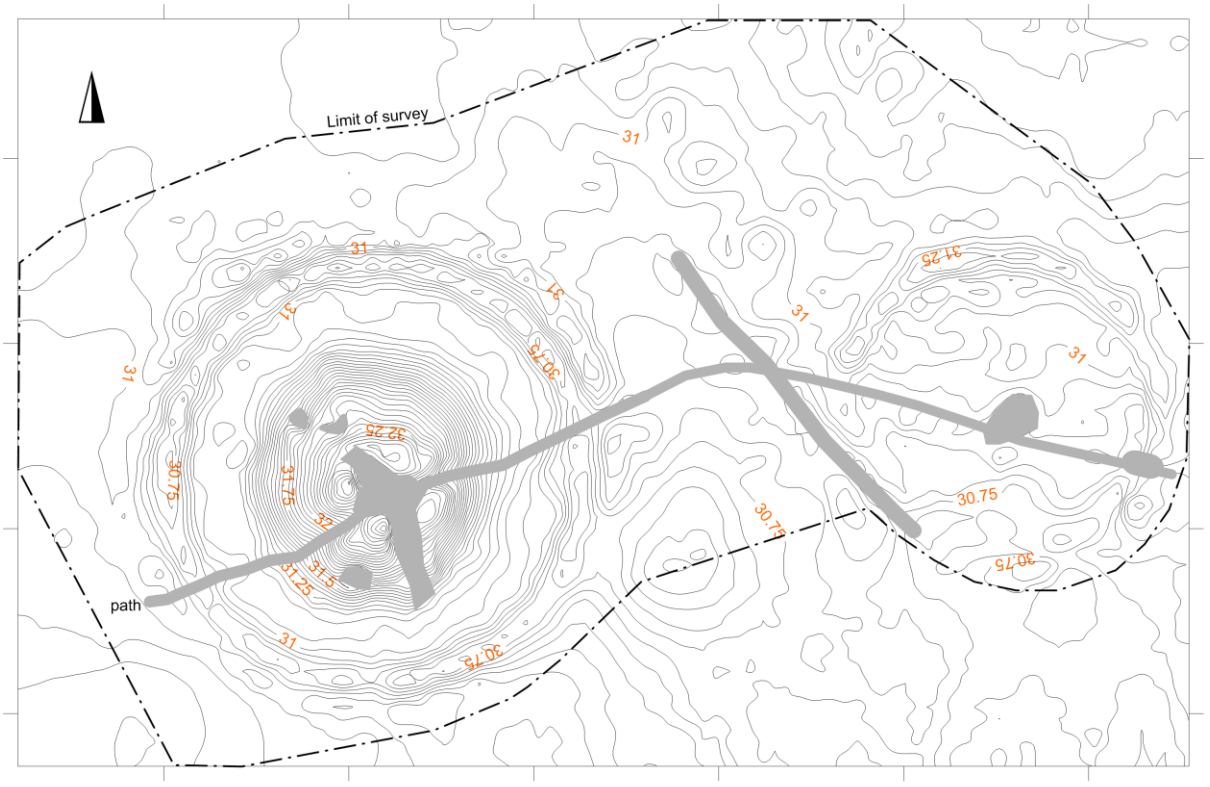

Fig 5 Horsell Common, Woking, Surrey Nat Mon no 20148
Contour survey of bell and disc barrows showing intrusive damage (grey tone).
Contour heights in metres and facing uphill

0 10 20 30 40m

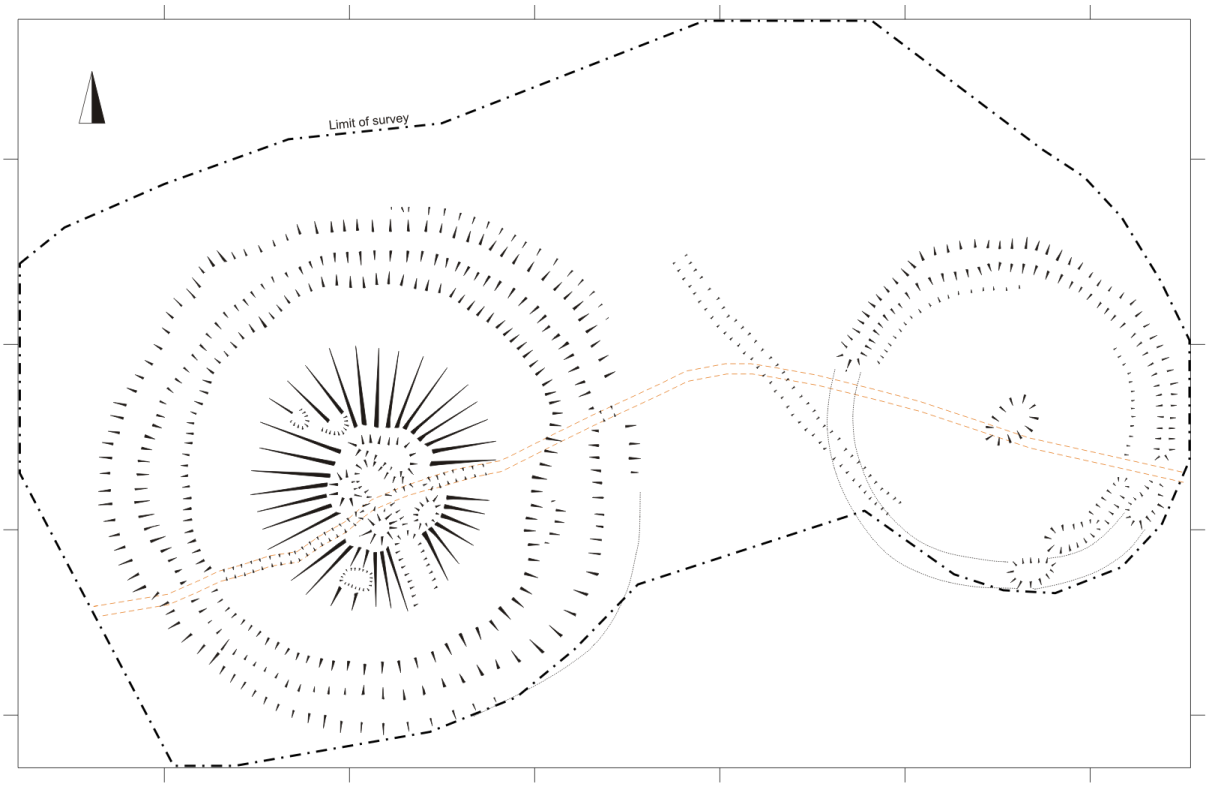

Fig 6 Horsell Common, Woking. Analytical (hachured) survey of bell and disc barrows. Path shown as orange dashed lines and damaged bank as dotted lines.

0 10 20 30 40m

disc barrow. The results showed a number of individual anomalies scattered apparently at random across the survey area (fig 2).

The Excavation

Following the surveys two 6m x 1.5m trenches (fig 2) were laid out over anomalies and along the line of the proposed path. Neither was excavated below a depth of 20cm as that was the expected limit of disturbance from the path works. Trench 2 was rapidly abandoned because the extensive network of tree roots prevented any meaningful excavation. Trench 1, however, produced a layer of ash and charcoal under the 10cm-thick needle litter at its eastern end. This in turn overlay three small parallel ditches (fig 7, [002], [004] and [006]). Being shallow, the ash layer appeared to be relatively recent in date and must have been the result of a small fire – probably the reason for most of the anomalies detected by the magnetometer. The ditches produced no datable material and their purpose and period remain unknown. No other archaeological features or material were recovered, so there is no evidence, at least from the areas examined, for any Bronze Age activity between the two barrows.

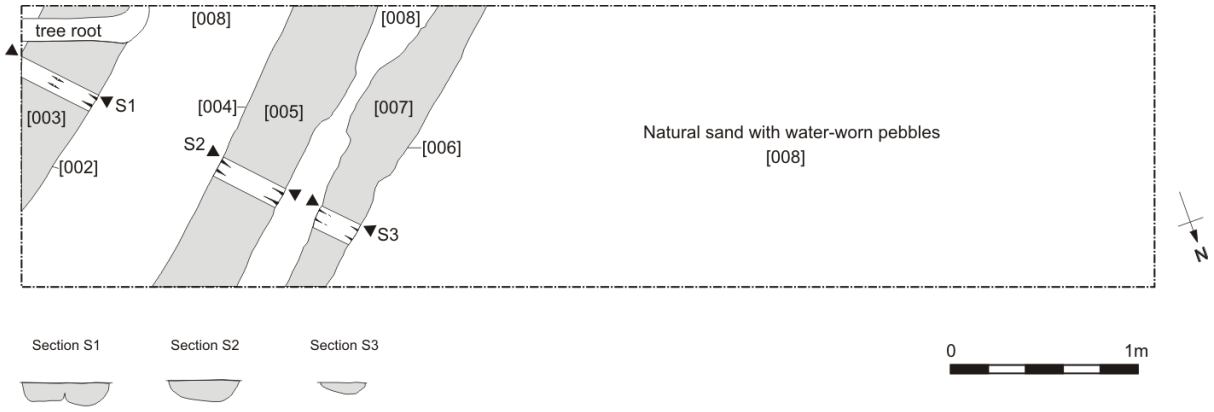

Fig 7 Horsell Common, Woking, Surrey Nat Mon no 20148
Trench 1 plan and sections

Acknowledgements

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References

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Grinsell, L V, 1987 Surrey barrows 1934–1986: a reappraisal, *Surrey Archaeol Collect*, **78**, 1–41

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